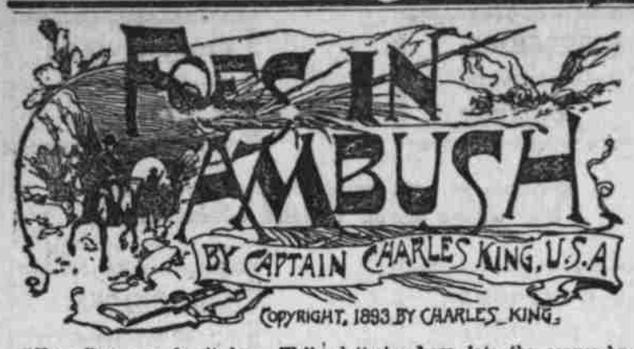

"Now, then, run for it, boy. Well done, you two, if ye are blackguards," he calls to Moreno and his mate. "They won't disturb ye again for 10 minutes anyhow. Hold your post, though, till we call you back. We're going to block the mouth of the cave."

Twenty minutes later, and working like beavers Costigan and his two men have lugged rocks, logs, bales of blankets, everything, anything that can stop a bullet, and the entrance to the cave is being stoutly barricaded. Patterson, who was sorely exposed at his post and ordered down by Lieutenant Drummond, is aiding in the work. Wing has been carefully borne into the back cave, whither, too, the wailing, quaking Moreno women are herded and bidden to hold their peace. There, too, Fanny and Ruth, silent, pallid perhaps, but making no moan, are now kneeling by their patient. Costigan runs in with two buckets he has filled with water and "Little Mac" follows with half a dozen dripping canteens. More rocks are being lifted on the barricade, convenient apertures being left through which to fire, and Costigan, feverishly eager, is making every exertion, for any minute may be the last with those plucky fellows battling there aloft. The air rings with the shots of the encircling Apaches and with the loud report of the cavalry carbine answering the hidden foe. Twice has Costigan implored the lieutenant to come down anyhow, so long as his crippled condition prevents his firing a gun, but Drummond pokes his bandaged head one instant over the edge to shout something to the effect that he is "on deck" until he has seen the last man down, and Costigan knows it is useless to argue. At last the barricade is ready. Walsh, peering grimly around, just the top of his head showing over the parapet, begs for one shot and shouts his Hibernian challenge to the Apache nation to come forth and show itself. Drummond picks up the glasses for one final look down the desert and across the valley in search of friends who surely should be coming, cautiously places the "binocular" on the inner edge of the top of his shelving rock, then raises his head to the level.

"Fur the love o' God, lieut'nant, don't sit so high up!" implores Walsh. "They're sure to spot— Oh, Christ!" And down goes the poor faithful fellow, the blood welling from a deep gash along the temple. He lies senseless at his commander's feet.

For a moment the air seems alive with humming missiles and shrill with yells from on every side. In their triumph

"Fur God's sake, come quick, sir!"

three or four savage foes have leaped up from behind their sheltering rocks, and one of them pays the penalty—a vengeful carbine from across the canyon stretches the lithe, slender, dusky form lifeless among the rocks with the dirty white of his breech clout turning crimson in the noonday glare. Up from the cave, catlike, Patterson and "Little Mac" come climbing the narrow trail. Between them they drag Walsh's senseless body to the edge, and then, somehow, despite hissing, spattering lead, they bear him safely down and carry him within the cave.

"Now call in Moreno and help his partner back!" shouts Drummond, and Costigan goes at speed to carry out the order. A few minutes of intense excitement and suspense, then Moreno is seen limping around the point. Behind him Costigan is slowly helping their brigand friend. A few more shots come singing overhead. A moment more and the watchful Indians will come charging up the now unguarded canyon and crown both banks.

"Now, lads, give 'em two or three shots apiece to make them hug their cover. Then down for the caves, every man of you," is the order.

For a moment the Indian fire is silenced in the rapid fusillade that follows. Sharp and quick the carbines are barking their challenge, and whenever a puff of powder smoke has marked the probable lurking place of an Apache, thither hiss the searching bullets warning him to keep down. Then Costigan comes climbing to the lookout.

"Let us help you, lieut'nant. Now's your time, sir, while they're firing."

But Drummond shakes his head. He wants to be the last man down.

"Don't hang on here, sir. Come now. Sure the others can get down from where they are easy enough, but you can't except when they're firing. Please come, sir," and Costigan in his eagerness scrambles to the lieutenant's side and lays a broad, red hand on his shoulder. The men have fired more than the designated number of shots and now are looking anxiously toward their commander. They do not wish to move until he does.

"Give 'em another whack all around, fellers," shouts Costigan, "while I help the lieut'nant down;" and so, with a laugh, Drummond gives it up, and after one last wistful glance out over the desert, turns to pick up the binocular, when it is struck, smashed, and sent clattering down into the canyon by a shot fired not 20 yards away.

"Fur God's sake, come quick, sir!" gasps Costigan. Then, desperate at his loved young leader's delay, the Irishman throws a brawny arm about him and fairly drags him to the end of the steep. Then down they go, Costigan leading and holding up one hand to sustain Drummond in case of accident. Down, hand under hand, to the accompaniment of cracking rifles and answering carbines, while every other second the bullets come "spat" upon the rocky sides, close and closer, until, almost breathless, Costigan reaches the solid bottom of the gorge and swings Drummond to his feet beside him. Seeing their leader safely down, the men, with one defiant shot and cheer, scurry to the edge of the canyon and come slipping and sliding to join their comrades. At the mouth of the cave Costigan strives to push Drummond in through the narrow aperture left for their admission, but miscalculates his commander's idea of the proprieties. Like gallant Craven at Mobile Bay, Drummond will seek no safety until his men are cared for. "After you, pilot," the chivalric sailor's last word as the green waters engulfed his sinking ship, finds its cavalry echo in Drummond's "After you, corporal," in this faraway canyon in desert Arizona. The men have scrambled through the gap, then Costigan, with reluctant backward glance, is hurried in just as a flash of flame and smoke leaps downward from the crest and the foremost Apache sends a hurried, ill aimed shot at the last man left. Before another shot can follow, Drummond's arm is seized by muscular hands, and he is dragged within the gap. Two or three huge stones are rolled into place, and in an instant through the ragged loopholes the black muzzles of half a dozen carbines are thrusting, and Costigan shouts exultingly, "Now, you black legged blackguards, come on if ye dare!"

But no Apache is fool enough to attack a strong position. Keeping well under cover, the Indians soon line the crest and begin sending down a rain of better aimed bullets at the loopholes, and every minute the flattened lead comes zipping through. One of these fearful missiles tears its way through Costigan's sleeve, and striking poor old Moreno in the groin stretches him groaning upon the floor. A glance shows that the wound is mortal, and despite his crimes the men who bear him, moaning, in to the farther cave are moved to sudden sympathy as his hapless wife and child prostrate themselves beside his rocky bier. Drummond can afford to lose no more and orders the lower half of each hole to be stopped with blankets, blouses, shirts, anything that will block a shot, and then for an hour the fire of the besiegers is harmless, and no longer can the besieged catch even an occasional glimpse of them. At noon their fire has ceased entirely, and even when breathing a sigh of relief the men look into one another's faces questioningly. How long can this last? How hot, how close the air in the cave is growing!

Drummond has gone for a moment into the inner chamber, where Moreno is now breathing his last, to inquire for Wing and to speak a word of cheer to his fair and devoted nurses. Not one murmur of complaint or dread has fallen from their lips, though they know their father to have ridden on perilous quest and into possible ambush; though they know their brother to be lying at the ruined ranch, perhaps seriously wounded; though their own fate may be capture, with indescribable suffering, shame and death. Fanny Harvey has behaved like a heroine, as the two troopers remarked, and Ruth has done her best to follow her sister's lead. Yet they, too, now realize how close and stifling the heavy atmosphere is growing. Is it to be the black hole of Calcutta over again? Even as he takes her hand in his Drummond reads the dread in Ruth's tearless face. Even as he holds it and whispers words of hope and comfort there is a heavy, continuous, crashing sound at the mouth of the cave, just in front of the rock barricade, and he springs back to learn the cause.

"They're heaving down logs and brushwood, sir," whispers Costigan. "They mean to roast us out if they can't do anything else."

More thunder and crash; more heaping up of resinous logs from the cliffs above them. Some of the men beg to be allowed to push out and die fighting, but Drummond sternly refuses. "At the worst," he says, "we can retire into the back cave; we have abundant water there. The air will last several hours yet, and I tell you help will come—must come, before the day is much older."

Two o'clock. Hissing flames and scorching heat block the cavern entrance. The rocky barrier grows hotter and hotter; the air within denser and more stifling. The water in the canteens and pails is no longer cool. It is hardly even cooling. The few men who remain with Drummond in the front of the cave are lying full length upon the floor. The pain in Drummond's battered head has become intense. It is almost maddening. Wing is moaning and unconscious. Walsh is incoherent and raving. All are panting and well nigh exhausted. The front of the cave is like an oven. Overcome by the heat, one or two of the men are edging toward the inner cave, but Drummond orders them back. To the very last the lives of those fair girls must be protected and cherished. In silence, almost in desperation, the men obey and lie down again, face downward, their heads at the rear wall of the cave.

And then Costigan comes crawling to the lieutenant's side:

"Have you heard any more logs thrown down lately, sir?"

"No, corporal. I have heard nothing."

"They were yellin and shootin out there in the gulch half an hour ago. Have ye heard no more of it, sir?"

"No; no sound but the flames."

"Glory be to God, thin! D'ye know wat hit manes, sir?"

"I know what I hope," is Drummond's faint answer. "Our fellows are close at hand, for the Indians are clearing out."

"Close at hand, is it?" cries Costigan, in wild excitement, leaping to his feet. "Listen, sir! Listen, all of yes! D'ye hear that?—and that? And there now! Oh, Holy Mother of God! isn't that music? Thim's the trumpets of K troop!"

Aye. Out along the crests of the winding canyon the rifles are ringing again. The cheers of troopers, bounding like goats up the rocky sides, are answered by clatter of hoof and snort of excited steeds in the rocky depths below. "Here we are, lads! Dismount! Lively now!" a well known voice is ordering, and Costigan fairly screams in ecstasy of joy, "Tear away the fire, captain, an then we'll heave over the rocks."

Stalwart forms, brawny arms, are already at the work. The wagon tongues are prying under the heavy, hissing, sputtering logs. Daring hands scatter the embers. Buckets of water are dashed over the live coals. "Up wid ye now, boys!" shouts Costigan. "Heave over thim rocks!" Down with a crash goes the barricade. A cloud of steam rushes into the cave. A dozen sturdy troopers come leaping in, lifting

A dozen sturdy troopers come leaping in.

from the ground the helpless and bearing them to the blessed coolness of the outer air, and the last thing Jim Drummond sees—ere he swoons away—is the pale, senseless face of little Ruth close to his at the water's brink; her father, with Fanny clinging about his neck, kneeling by her side, his eyes uplifted in thanks to the God who even through such peril and distress has restored his loved ones, unharmed, unstained, to his rejoicing heart.

CHAPTER XII.

It is a sultry day, early in July, and the sun is going westward through a fleet of white, wind driven clouds that send a host of deep shadows sweeping and chasing over the wide prairie. Northward the view is limited by a low range of bluffs, destitute of tree or foliage, but covered thickly with the summer growth of bunch grass. Southward, three miles away at least, though it seems much less, a similar range, pierced here and there with deep ravines, frames the picture on that side. Midway between the two ridges and fringed with clumps of cottonwood and willow, a languid stream flows silently eastward and is lost with the valley in the dim distance. Out to the west in long, gradual curve the southward range veers around and spans the horizon. Midway across this monotone of landscape, cutting the stream at right angles, a hard prairie road comes twisting and turning out of one of the southern ravines, and after a long, gradual dip to the ford among the cottonwoods emerges from their leafy shade and goes winding away until lost among the "breaks" to the north. It is one of the routes to the Black Hills of Dakota—the wagon road from the Union Pacific at Sidney by way of old Fort Robinson, Neb., where a big garrison of some 14 companies of cavalry and infantry keep watch and ward over the Sioux nation, which, one year previous, was in the midst of the maddest, most successful war it ever waged against the white man. That was the centennial year—1876. This is another eventful year for the cavalry—1877; for before the close of the summer even the troops so far to the southeast are destined to be summoned to the chase and capture of wary old Chief Joseph—the greatest Indian general ever reared upon the Pacific slope—and even now, on this July day, here are cavalrymen at their accustomed task, and though it is five years since we saw them under the heat and glare of the Arizona sun there are familiar faces among these that greet us.

All along under the cottonwoods below the crossing the bivouac extends. Long before sunrise these hardy fellows were in saddle, and in long column have come marching down from the north—four strong troops—a typical battalion of regular cavalry as they looked and rode in those stirring days that brought about the subjugation of the Sioux. Out on the prairie the four herds of the four different troops are quietly grazing, each herd watched by its trio of alert, though often apparently dozing, guards. One troop is made up entirely of black horses, another of sorrels—two are of bays. Another herd is grazing close to the stream—the mules of the wagon train—and the white tops of these ambrous vehicles are dotting the left bank of the winding water for 200 or 300 yards. Cook fires are smoldering in little pits dug in the yielding soil, but the cooking is over for the present. The men have had their substantial dinner and are now smoking or sleeping or chatting in groups in the shade—all but a squad of a dozen, commanded by a grizzled veteran on whose worn blouse the chevrons of a first sergeant are stitched. Booted and spurred, with carbines slung and saddles packed, these sun tanned fellows are standing or sitting at ease, holding the reins of their sleepy chargers and waiting apparently for the passengers who are to start in the stout built Concord drawn by four sleek, strong looking mules, now standing in the shade near the canvas homestead of the commanding officer.

Presently two soldiers following a young man in civilian dress come forward lugging a little green painted iron safe, and this, with a swing and a thud, they deposit in the wagon.

"You've seen that before, sergeant," laughs the civilian.

"I have, begad, an when it had a heap more green inside an less outside than it has now. Faith, I never expected to see it again, nor the paymaster either. We were both bored through an through. 'Twas our good habits that saved us. Sure your predecessor was a game fighter, Mr. Barnes, if he was a tenderfoot."

"Yes, the major often tells me he wishes he had him back, and me in the place he has instead of the one he had," answers the clerk whimsically. "Does he know you're to command the escort in? You got him into such a scrape then that he's never tired of telling of it."

"Then he may feel gratified at the honor I am doing him now. Sure it's beneath the dignity of a first sergeant to command a squad like this except on an extraordinary occasion, an it's to take the taste of the last time out of his mouth I volunteered to escort the major now. 'Twas a strong taste to last five years, though my reminder will go with me many a year longer. Here they come now."

As the sergeant speaks a little group of officers issues from the battalion commander's tent. Foremost among them, in loose flapping raiment and broad brimmed hat and green goggles, is the rotund and portly shape of Major Plummer, the paymaster.

"Well, old man," says the cavalry leader, "you can hardly get into a scrape 'twixt here and Sidney. We've seen you through all right so far; now we'll go on about our scouting. Your old friend Feeny asked permission to see you safely to the railway."

"What, Feeny, and a first sergeant too? I'm honored indeed! Well, sergeant," he adds, catching sight of the grizzled red face under the old scouting hat, "I'll promise to let you run the machine this time and not interfere, no matter what stories come to us of beauty in distress. All ready?"

"All ready, sir, if the major is."

"He wasn't that civil to me in Arizona," laughs the paymaster as he turns to shake hands with the officers about him.

"You see you were new to the business then," explains a tall captain. "Feeny considers you a war veteran now, after your experience at Moreno's. We all had to serve our apprenticeship as suckling lieutenants before he would show us anything but a semblance of respect. Goodby, major; good luck to you."

"Goodby all. Goodby, Drummond. Goodby, Wing. Here! I must shake hands with you two again." And shake he does; then is slowly "boosted" into his wagon, where, as the whip cracks and the mules plunge at their collars and tilt him backward, the major's jolly red face beams on all around, and he waves his broad brimmed hat in exuberant cordiality as they rattle away.

The group of officers presently disperse, two tall lieutenants strolling off together and throwing themselves under the spreading branches of a big cottonwood. One of them, darker and somewhat heavier built now, but muscular, active, powerful, is Drummond; the other, a younger man by a brace of years, tall, blue eyed, blond bearded, wearing on his scouting blouse the straps of a second lieutenant, is our old friend Wing, and Wing does not hesitate in presence of his senior officer—such is the bond of friendship between them—to draw from his breast pocket a letter just received that day when the courier met them at the crossing of the Dry Fork, and to lose himself in its contents.

"All well with the madam and the kid?" queries Drummond, after the manner of the frontier, when at last Wing folds and replaces his letter, a happy light in his brave blue eyes.

"All well. Paquita says that Harvey has captured the entire household, and that Grandpa Harvey is his abject slave. There isn't anything in Chicago too good for that 2-year-old. They've had them photoed together—the kid on his grandfather's shoulder."

"Aren't you afraid his Arizona uncle will be jealous for his own boy's sake?" laughs Drummond.

"I don't believe Ned would begrudge Fanny anything the old man might feel for her or for hers. He is generosity itself toward his sisters, and surely I could never have found a warmer friend—out of the army. You know how he stood by me."

"I know, and it was most gratifying—not but that I feel sure you would have won without his aid. The old man simply couldn't quite be reconciled to her marrying in the army and living in Arizona."

"A strange land for a honeymoon certainly—yet where and when was there a happier? Do you remember how the Apaches jumped the Verde buckboard the very week after we were married?"

"And you spent half of the honeymoon scouting the Tonto basin? I should say so! What with a courtship in a robbers' cave, a marriage in a cavalry camp and a wedding tour in saddle, you had a unique experience, Wing, but—you deserved her." And Drummond turns and grips his comrade's hand.

Wing is silent a moment. His eyes are wistfully searching the elder's half averted face.

"Jim, you told me awhile ago of your sister's approaching marriage. Are you not going on?"

"Yes. It will be early in October. She's blissfully happy, is Puss, and he's a very substantial, solid sort of a fellow. I'm well content, at last, that her future is assured."

"And you are a free agent practically. Isn't it time we heard of your own happiness—your own vine and fig tree, old man?"

"Time's gone by, I reckon," laughs Drummond, yet not merrily. "I've had too much to think of—too much responsibility—and probably have lost my chance."

Wing looks as though he wanted mightily to say something, but conquers his impulse.

"October is a long way off," he finally remarks, "and I thought you might find earlier opportunity of going east. Now that Ned has entire charge of the business in Arizona the old gentleman takes life easier. The winter in Cuba did him a lot of good, and Fan writes that he seems so happy now, having his two girls and his little grandson under the same roof with his sister and her children. What a reunion after all these years!"

"Where are they living in Chicago?"

"You would know better than I, for—think of it!—I have never been east of the Missouri since my babyhood," answers Wing. "Fan writes that her aunt has a lovely house on what they call the North Side—near the great waterworks at the lake front."

"I know the neighborhood well," says Drummond. "Chicago is as familiar to me as San Francisco was to you. Only—I have no roof to call my own anywhere, and as soon as Puss is married shall not have a relative or friend on earth who is not much more deeply interested in somebody else." And the senior lieutenant is lying on his back now, blinking up at the rapidly scudding clouds. Presently he pulls the broad brim of his campaign hat down over his eyes. "What do you hear from your mother, Wing?"

"Nothing new. Bless the dear old lady! You should have seen her happiness in Harvey. She could hardly bear to let the little fellow out of her arms, and how she cried and clung to him when we parted at the Oakland wharf! Poor little mother! She has never given up the hope of seeing that scapegrace of an uncle of mine again."

"Has she ever heard how he tried to murder his nephew?" queries Drummond grimly.

"Never. Nor have we the faintest trace of him since the break up of the old Morales gang at Fronteras. They went all to pieces after their encounter with you and C troop. What a chain of disasters! Lost their leaders and three of their best men, lost their rendezvous at Moreno's, lost horses and mules—for what our men didn't get the Apaches did—and won absolutely nothing except the 24 hour possession of a safe they hadn't time to open. Whereas I got my commission and my wife; Feeny, honorable wounds and mention and the chevrons of a first sergeant; Costigan got his sergeant's stripes and the medal of honor, Murphy his sergeantcy, Walsh and Latham medals and corporalships, and the only fellow who didn't get a blessed thing but scars was the commanding lieutenant—your worthy self—thanks to wiseacres at Washington who say Indian fighting isn't war."

"Didn't I get a letter of thanks from the department commander?" grins Drummond. "What else could I expect?"

"What else?" is Wing's impulsive rejoinder. Then, as though mindful of some admonition, quieting at once and speaking in tone less suggestive, "Well, in your case I suppose you can be content with nothing, but bless me if I could." Then, suddenly rising and respectfully touching his weather beaten hat, he salutes a stoutly built, soldierly looking man in rough scouting dress, whose only badge of rank is the tarnished shoulder strap with the silver leaf on the shabbiest old fatigue coat to be found in the battalion, most of whose members, however, wear no coat at all.

"Hullo, Wing—didn't mean to disturb your siesta—Drummond here?" says the commander in his offhand way, and at sound of the well known voice Drummond, too, is on his feet in a twinkling.

"Seen the papers that came in today?" queries the colonel, obliterating from his sentences all verbal superfluities.

"Not yet, sir; any news?"

"H—l to pay in Chicago, so far as heard from. The railway strike has taken firm hold there. Police and militia both seem unable to do anything against the mob, and the authorities are stampeded. Your home, isn't it?"

"It was once, sir, but that was many a long year ago."

"W-e-ell," says the colonel reflectively, stroking his grizzled beard, "it's my belief there is worse to come. It isn't the striking railway hands that will do the mischief, but every time there's a strike all the thieves and thugs and blackguards in the community turn out. That's what happened in Pittsburg—that's what's the matter in Chicago. It looks to me as though the plea for regular troops would have to be granted."

"Think we can get there, sir?" asks Wing eagerly.

[CONTINUED.]